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FLYTE OF ODYSSEUS:
ALLUSION AND THE *HOPLŌN KRISIS*
IN QUINTUS SMYRNAEUS *POSTHOMERICA* 5

CALUM ALASDAIR MACIVER



Abstract. This article principally discusses the contest between Ajax and Odysseus in Quintus Smyrnaeus *Posthomerica* 5. Scholars have recently labelled the poem as a “Second Sophistic epic,” partly on the basis of discussion of the *Hoplōn Krisis* in Book 5. I begin by discussing the literary and cultural context of the *Posthomerica*, and especially the contest in Book 5, in relation to this label. I then show that the contest is closely modelled on speech-making situations in the *Iliad*, particularly contests of “flyting.” I discuss the nature of flyting speeches, and discuss how Odysseus is made to appropriate Iliadic flyting settings to prove his worth as the rightful heir to the arms.

INTRODUCTION

BOOK 5 OF QUINTUS SMYRNAEUS’ *POSTHOMERICA*, of the epic’s fourteen books, generally receives the most discussion.¹ This is not surprising given that three of the poem’s most important elements in terms of literary inheritance occur in it: the description of the arms of Achilles (6–120), the *hoplōn krisis*, or, contest for the arms of Achilles (125–321), and the madness and suicide of Ajax (322–486). Book 5 is also the focus of one of three commentaries on specific parts of the *Posthomerica*, the other two on Book 12 and on the first part of Book 1 (1–219).² Recent scholarship has gone some way to assess the poem as a work of literature with intrinsic poetic merits.³ This attention is in marked contrast to the negative critical appraisal which held sway until only recently.⁴ The primary

¹The editions used in this article are for Quintus Smyrnaeus, Vian (1963–69); for Homer, the Oxford Classical Text of Monro and Allen (3d ed., 1920); and for Hesiod, Solmsen, Merkelbach, and West (3d ed., 1990). All translations are my own.

²James and Lee 2000, Campbell 1981, and Bär 2009.

³In particular, James and Lee 2000, James 2004, Baumbach and Bär 2007, and Maciver 2012a.

⁴The abrasive conclusion on the poem by Lloyd-Jones 1969, 101, reflects some of this scholarship: “The anaemic pastiche served up by Quintus is utterly devoid of life.”

target of what was at times vitriolic censure was the epic's imitation of Homer.⁵ In this article I will discuss the poem's Homeric identity through analysis of the exchange of speeches between Ajax and Odysseus in the *hoplōn krisis* (*Posthomerica* 5). I will illustrate that the contest between the two heroes is formulated to reflect exactly a Homeric *neikos* or "flyt-ing" contest, and will argue that, within the tradition in poetry and oratory involving the *hoplōn krisis*, Quintus creates within a framework of these later (partly Second Sophistic) influences an overtly Iliadic presentation. I will show that the two heroes echo similar contexts and specific phrasing of Iliadic situations, and in so doing, restage the clichés about themselves as characters and about the polarities within the *Iliad*, such as the conflict between the usefulness of deeds versus words.

THE *HOPLŌN KRISIS* AND THE SECOND SOPHISTIC

The contest for the arms of Achilles between Ajax and Odysseus is first alluded to in the *Iliad* itself.⁶ In Book 23.708–39, in Patroclus' funeral games, the wrestling contest between the two heroes echoes the preexisting tale of their (mythologically later) contest.⁷ The guile shown by Odysseus there (725–31) to compete successfully in the wrestling contest reflects his argument in *Posthomerica* 5 that brawn without guile is without avail.⁸ A more concrete reflection of the contest occurs at *Odyssey* 11.541–65, where the spirit of Ajax, still bitter in defeat, does not answer Odysseus. The story was told in the *Aethiopis* and the *Ilias Parva*, with variations on who gave the judgement, and how that judgement was made. Beyond epic poetry, there is the (lost) *hoplōn krisis* of Aeschylus and of course Sophocles' *Ajax* itself. The story is also used by Pindar at *Nemean* 7.20–30 and *Isthmian* 4.35–39. Pindar presents a very partisan account of the contest in favour of Ajax as opposed to the deceitful and manipulative Odysseus.

Recent discussion of "verdicts" on the poem's merits can be found in Baumbach and Bär 2007, 23–25; Maciver 2012a, 24–27.

⁵On this imitation as "particularly brave and clever or particularly stupid and ingenuous," see Schmitz 2007, 65.

⁶For a complete but brief survey of the contest in literary tradition, see Bömer 1982, 196–97.

⁷So Whitman 1958, 263–64; Kullmann 2005, 24–25; Burgess 2009, 92.

⁸Cf. Hopkinson 2000, 12, on *Iliad* 23: "This contest in *facta* seems in some ways to prefigure the contest in *verba* which in a later poem took place over the arms of Achilles. Wrestling is a trial of strength in which brain can however overcome brawn."

The poetic tradition passes down into Hellenistic literature and from there to Latin poetry. Ovid *Metamorphoses* 13.1–381 presents a complete version of the contest, and there are clear similarities between that account and the presentation in Quintus.⁹ It is with the prose tradition, however, that I am primarily concerned. The story from the fifth century B.C.E. onwards became a popular setting for rhetorical exercises in schools; the contest was ideal as it contains two speeches, and an important part of such education was to be able to argue both sides of an argument with equal validity.¹⁰ Antisthenes' version of the contest (fourth century B.C.E.) is an extant example from the First Sophistic where both Ajax and Odysseus are given speeches on their relative merits for receiving the armour of Achilles. Antisthenes clearly favours Odysseus as one who reflects his own proto-Cynic ideals over Ajax who represents the opposite, of an outdated order.¹¹ Antisthenes' Odysseus even appropriates the chronology of his literary situation by suggesting that a later poet (i.e., Homer) will come to speak of his own merits in contrast to Ajax, who will be likened to asses and oxen.¹²

At the level of detail, the versions of Antisthenes and Quintus are relatively dissimilar, beyond the inevitable resonances according to the traditional details of the myth. Antisthenes' conceited foreshadowing of the Homeric account, however, from which he inherits both characters, explicitly verbalises what Quintus makes implicit. Homeric authority is claimed by Odysseus for his argument in Antisthenes, and the character traits formulated by the two heroes only work according to the listener's/reader's knowledge of the Homeric poems, where their claims can be referenced. Quintus' Odysseus makes similar, but coded, references to the Iliadic presentation of both heroes by alluding to specific textual situations and phrasing to validate his own argument. Antisthenes' appeal in the words of Odysseus to the Homeric world, however, is in contrast to the overall rhetorical, un-Homeric tenor of the speech. As we shall see, Odysseus' words in the *Posthomerica* are framed according to the particular restraints of Homeric speechmaking, but the temporal distance

⁹ See James and Lee 2000, 80–81, and in general for Ovid, Hopkins 2000.

¹⁰ On Greek sophistic education in Rome, and especially on the use of historical themes in speeches, see Bonner 1977, 278–83, and 297–308, on (esp. Roman) training for legal declamation. On Imperial rhetoric and its relationship with Homeric epic, see the comparative approach of Korenjak 2003.

¹¹ On Antisthenes as reflecting the Socratic defence of Odysseus (e.g., in the *Hippias minor*), see LévyStone 2005. Contrast Whitmarsh 2001, 197, n. 64: "Antisthenes' version of the debate . . . clearly casts Odysseus in the role of the glib sophist."

¹² Antisthenes 15.14.

between Quintus and Homer, despite the chronology of the myth, surfaces as Odysseus points to previous portrayals, just as “he” does in Antisthenes.

This *sophistic* presentation of the contest in Antisthenes is assumed to be common too in the literary culture of the Second Sophistic, although there is no similar lengthy treatment.¹³ Apart from only vague references in the sophistic works of Libanius and Theon,¹⁴ we can only make assumptions of its popularity from other representations or discussions in fictional works.¹⁵ The *Posthomerica* is bound to represent the contest because of its plot (it does not purposefully choose this episode because of any possible popularity of it in declamatory education or exercises), but is likely also to reflect some of its contemporary (or received) representations of the respective speeches of the heroes. Commentators on this passage have noted the fact that Quintus is unique in giving both Ajax and Odysseus two speeches rather than one each, an aspect which has been taken to reflect courtroom practice.¹⁶ The rhetorical nature of the speeches, especially that of Odysseus and the manner in which it answers (some of the points of) the speech of Ajax, has been raised by Vian,¹⁷ and much earlier, by Eustathius 1698.48 (on *Odyssey* 11.546), who states that Quintus describes the judgement in a rhetorical fashion (*rhetorikōs*).¹⁸

What is certainly apparent is that the frame of the contest suggests similarities to contemporary declamatory practice. Thetis (5.123–27) sets up two essential conditions for the adjudication of the arms: the person who rescued the body of Achilles should step forward, and this person should be the best of the Achaeans (5.125). These two categories are a combination of two kinds of declamation theme which fall under the *stasis*

¹³ Bär 2010, 298: “The contest . . . and its aftermath were popular subjects among Second Sophistic authors” although I have been able to find little actual literary evidence formally to substantiate this assumption. See Bömer 1982, 196–97, and Bär 2010, n. 40, for references.

¹⁴ Libanius *Progymnasmata* 11.5 and Theon *Progymnasmata* 10.112.20–23, Spengel (both cited in Bär 2010, 298, n. 40, but the latter does not explicitly relate the contest to epideictic oratory during the Second Sophistic). Cf. Anderson 1993, 71, who can cite only two passages (that of Libanius, mentioned above, and Lucian *D. Mort.*, mentioned in the next note) to support his claims that the episode was a “favourite situation.” On declamation or *melete* in this period, see Heath 1995, 17–18.

¹⁵ Pace Bär 2010, 298. Discussions of the contest in Lucian (e.g., *D. Mort.* 20–23, and even the mention of the contest at *VH* 2.7) do not necessarily substantiate claims of its popularity in the Second Sophistic; context in those places demands its presence.

¹⁶ Vian 1966, 12–13; James and Lee 2000, 80; Bär 2010, 298.

¹⁷ Vian 1966, 10.

¹⁸ Full discussion and commentary in James and Lee 2000, 80–102 (esp. 80–82); there is some useful discussion too in Köchly 1850, 279–88.

of definition.¹⁹ Both Ajax and Odysseus claim to satisfy the first category, namely that of rescuing the corpse. Similarly, there are examples in Greek declamation themes of two rival claimants to a single prize on the basis of contribution to the single outcome.²⁰ For the second category, on the best of the Achaeans, one can compare declamation themes where a will is left to the most useful son: these sons can be, for example, a doctor and a philosopher, and so discussion naturally arises as to who is the most useful.²¹

It is of course also inevitable that Quintus' "Homeric" rhetoric will be more marked than in Homer;²² signs of rhetoric are emblematic of the *lateness* of this *new* Homeric epic of Quintus, but in keeping with the careful construction of the *Posthomeric* to be as Homeric as possible;²³ in the case of these speeches the techniques displayed are already, to a certain extent, evident as rhetorical speech strategies in Homer.²⁴ For example, the fact that elements of a speech are answered point by point is something to be found in the response of Odysseus to Agamemnon at *Iliad* 14.83–102, and more significantly, as the bT scholia discuss, in the response of Achilles to the speech of Odysseus in *Iliad* 9.²⁵ The commentators also highlight the fact that Ajax begins his speech with a *prothesis* ("statement of the case": 5.183–90, that Ajax rescued Achilles' body and so merits the armour), which is built upon by a series of *pisteis* ("proofs") "in the standard manner of forensic speeches."²⁶ Odysseus' speech follows

¹⁹ See Heath 1995, 18–24, on "issues" for full discussion of *stasis*.

²⁰ See esp. Sopater *Division of Questions* in *Rhetores Graeci* 8.98.12–100.17 (Waltz 1968): a man ascended the acropolis to kill the tyrant; the tyrant fled and was killed by another man who encountered him by chance; the two men contest the reward. Cf. also Lucian's *Tyrannicide*, which contains the same theme, with variations.

²¹ Best example of this can be found in anon. *Rhetorical Problems*, in *Rhetores Graeci* 8.412.21–23 (Waltz 1968); cf. also Quintilian 7.1.38–39, 7.4.39. I am indebted to Malcolm Heath for these references.

²² Especially at *Posthomeric* 5.243–50, on which see the discussion of James and Lee 2000, 94, and my discussion below.

²³ Cf. principally Vian 1959 (study of sources of Quintus); Vian 1963, xxviii–ix; James 2004, xxi–ix. On the interaction between later philosophical and literary influences and the Homeric indebtedness of the poem, see Maciver 2007, esp. 281–84, and esp. Maciver 2012a, 39–124.

²⁴ Hopkinson 2000, 16, notes that many of the rhetorical aspects of the contest's representation in Ovid (*Metamorphoses* 13) derive first and foremost from Homeric "rhetorical" practice. The fact that the *hoplōn krisis* is a *contest* is in keeping with all speeches in Homer: as Martin 1989, 95, illustrates, "all speech in Homer takes place in an agonistic context."

²⁵ The scholia comment on *Il.* 9.316, 365, 366, and 378 in particular: see Nünlist 2009, 320, for further discussion.

²⁶ James and Lee 2000, 81.

a similar structure. The type of gnomic examples or *paradeigmata* he gives to support his premise at the beginning (5.242, that words and wit increase the strength of a man) can be found too, for example, in Nestor's speech in *Iliad* 1 to Achilles and Agamemnon (1.254–84), where he uses the *a fortiori* paradigm of the Lapiths to prove his argument that the two heroes should cease from anger.²⁷ What appears as (and to a large extent is) later rhetorical features of the Posthomeric speeches, influenced by contemporary declamation themes and practice, is at the same time an amplification of what is already visible in Homer. The art of flying, which I will show as primarily Homeric, also to a considerable extent reflects the prowess shown in contemporary epideictic oratory, a sort of performance in the artistry of speechmaking very much with audience reception and reaction in mind:²⁸ to this extent Quintus' readership would identify with the fundamental prominence with which speechmaking is presented in Book 5, even in its guise as Homeric flying. It is, however, on the Homeric nature of these speech strategies that this article will concentrate.

I have shown that the contemporary reception of the contest of arms, and especially declamatory practice, is important for understanding the nature of the presentation in Book 5. But as a label for the *Posthomeric*, the Second Sophistic is not appropriate. The recent conference proceedings on Quintus, published in late 2007, have the title: *Quintus Smyrnaeus: Transforming Homer in Second Sophistic Epic*.²⁹ Similarly, an article by Bär published in 2010 uses parts of the *hoplōn krisis* episode in Book 5 to argue for strong influences of the Second Sophistic upon the whole *Posthomeric*.³⁰ The Second Sophistic, however, as a label claimed by modern critics from Philostratus to describe the literary and cultural practice of the first to third centuries C.E., does not fit well with the *Posthomeric*.³¹ The *Posthomeric* is in Homeric Greek,

²⁷ For further discussion of Nestor's speech, see Kirk 1985, 80–82, and esp. Alden 2000, 76–81, and for discussion of the inherent rhetoric, Toohey 1994, 154–57 (who also states at 153, that “Homer's speeches were not shaped from any clear-cut template”).

²⁸ Cf. the brief comments of Heath 1995, 10–11.

²⁹ Baumbach and Bär 2007.

³⁰ Bär 2010.

³¹ The term is first used at Philostratus *Lives of the Sophists* 481. The best discussion of the Second Sophistic is Whitmarsh 2005, supplemented by Schmitz 1997. Few notice that the Second Sophistic referred to by Philostratus begins with Aeschines in the fourth century B.C.E., and is a term used to contrast the mainly philosophical outlook of the First Sophistic, characterised by the works of Gorgias and his followers.

not the required Attic of the Sophist purists;³² it is a hexameter text which imitates Homer closely, unlike the prose texts which characterise the era and rhetorical categories.³³ Bowie has demonstrated that there was a closer connection between the Sophists and poetry in this period than was previously assumed, but he admits that epic poetry especially was unlikely to have been written by the Sophists of the period.³⁴ In the case of the *hoplōn krisis* of Book 5, Quintus does incorporate emphases which bespeak a contemporary rhetorical influence. But in keeping with the nature of the whole epic, Quintus keeps to form by ensuring that the fundamental hue and integral intertextuality of the contest is Homeric. The *Posthomerica* as a whole cannot be a Second Sophistic epic by rights of what the Second Sophistic entails.³⁵ Furthermore, given the mannered Homeric nature of the epic and the poetological implications of this identity, it is an interpretative misconception to attempt to create such a label. Quintus certainly receives Homer within a cultural and literary context bound up with Second Sophistic declamatory practice, but he is not constructing a Second Sophistic epic.

THE BEST OF THE ACHAEANS

Ajax is explicitly praised by the primary narrator just as the contest begins, in accordance with the place of honour he is given in the poem as best after Achilles and therefore the natural replacement (*Posthomerica* 5.130–33):

³² On Atticism in Second Sophistic texts, see Whitmarsh 2005, 42–43, and Kennedy 1994, 231–32 (and on the extremes of Atticism cf. Lucian *Hist. conscr.* 21); on the role of poetry in the movement see Bär 2010, 290 n. 13, and esp. Bowie 1989.

³³ Bär 2010, 288, admits this: “Quintus’ *Posthomerica* represents a type of text uncharacteristic of this period.” This statement is in contrast to his well-argued (though tenuous) claims for sophistic performance on stage of the *Posthomerica* (13) or that “the *Posthomerica* may have been perceived as a reference text of Greek self-definition from a political point of view.”

³⁴ Bowie 1989, 256: “[Epic] required long hours of composition and virtuoso skills as well as a mixture of flair and *paideia* . . . these requirements may not have been easily compatible with a sophistic career.” Bowie expands by stating that “even Aristides, who hardly taught and where illness created a sort of leisure, seems not to have put his hand to epic.”

³⁵ The only work which could come close to the label of a Sophist’s epic is Scopelianus’ *Gigantias*, at the beginning of the Second Sophistic, an anomaly in the otherwise strong absence of epic from the period. See, further, Bowie 1989, 255.

Αἴας, ὃς μέγα πάντας ὑπείρεχεν ἐν Δαναοῖσιν,
 ἀστήρ ὥς ἀρίδηνος ἀν' οὐρανὸν αἰγλήεντα
 Ἑσπερος, ὃς μέγα πᾶσι μετ' ἄστροσι παμφαίνῃσι·
 τῷ εἰκὼς τεύχεσσι παρίστατο Πηλεΐδαο.

Ajax, who by far excelled all others among the Greeks, like a very bright star in the glowing sky, the Evening Star which greatly outshines all the other stars round about; like that star did he stand next to the armour of the son of Peleus.

Not only does the poet place this simile strategically just before the contest begins, but makes the meaning to be taken from the simile, that Ajax is superior to Odysseus as well as all the other Greeks,³⁶ all the more explicit by stating that like that star did Ajax stand beside what was his rightful inheritance, doomed to fall to Odysseus by rights of literary tradition. As the contest is concerned with the Iliadic concept of the “best of the Achaeans” (*Iliad* 1.91), the primary narrator, in this epic narrative, makes clear who “that” is before the contest begins. The Homeric inheritance of the simile cements this idea. At *Iliad* 22.317–19, Achilles in his divinely made armour (shortly before he kills Hector) is compared to the Evening Star which stands as brightest in the sky.³⁷ The evocation of this Iliadic setting for Ajax himself, with Achilles in the armour for which Ajax will compete, reiterates the idea of Ajax as the *novus Achilles* that the poem propounds previously. At *Posthomerica* 4.498–99, for example, Ajax, undefeated (then unchallenged) in Achilles’ funeral games, is said, as she looks upon him, to remind Thetis of her son Achilles.³⁸ This portrayal is consistent with the favourable portrait of his heroism in Homer,³⁹ including the *Odyssey*, where Odysseus himself calls Ajax the best of the Achaeans, after Achilles (11.551–52). For characterisation, Quintus starts off within the realms of archaic poetry and

³⁶ Cf. Vian 1966, 23, n. 2: “L’image sert à souligner la supériorité d’Ajax sur son rival”; James and Lee 2000, 71: “The most remarkable feature of this passage is its unashamed prejudice in favour of Ajax in the elaborate statement of his pre-eminence.” On similes in the *Posthomerica*, see esp. Maciver 2012a, 125–92.

³⁷ *Hesperos* (*Il.* 22.318) occupies the same metrical position as it holds in the Posthomeric version. Cf. Vian 1966, 23, n. 2, who also cites Ap. Rhod. 2.40–42 as a parallel, and James and Lee 2000, 72.

³⁸ Other examples of this favoritism occur at 3.217, where he is compared to the gods as he defends the body of Achilles, and 3.246–49, where Glaucus closely identifies him with Achilles.

³⁹ Cf. James and Lee 2000, 71 (following Mansur 1940, 13–15, an altogether unfavourable account of the *Posthomerica*) on the “one-sided characterisation of Ajax as a paragon of heroic virtue” consistent with his portrayal in Homer.

presents a picture of Ajax and Odysseus more in keeping with Homer and Pindar than the sophistic representations of Antisthenes or later appropriations of Odysseus.⁴⁰

Ajax's claims about the rescue of Achilles' body (5.183–86 and 218–22), and Odysseus' counterclaims (5.285–86, and to Neoptolemus at 7.208–9), point to the deceit of Odysseus, as the narrative of *Posthomerica* 3 verifies—the traditional doubt about events after the death of Achilles are taken away by the same poem's narration of the action:⁴¹ Ajax alone defends the body of Achilles (3.212–387), and unspecified kings drag the corpse away after the Trojans have been dealt with (385–86).⁴² Odysseus has been “set up” as the unfair winner of the contest. The deceit of Odysseus is a tenet of his post-Iliadic character especially but is already present at, for example, Achilles' interpretation of him at *Iliad* 9.312–14 (“hateful to me like the gates of Hades is that man who says one thing but hides the other in his heart”);⁴³ he is described by Agamemnon as prone to “ill-suited trickery” (*kakoi doloī*) at *Iliad* 4.339. Any efforts to identify the Posthomeric deceit of Odysseus with similar contemporary portraits should take into account the long tradition of Odysseus, from Homer through Tragedy, as a manipulative speaker.⁴⁴ But in actual fact there is nothing in the presentation of Odysseus in the contest out of keeping with his Homeric *persona*;⁴⁵ he actually alludes to his own Iliadic characterisation, as we shall see. The directness of Ajax is also typically Homeric, more in keeping with what Achilles desires: someone who speaks to the point, as the warm reaction to Ajax from Achilles at *Iliad* 9.645 makes clear. The consistent and intrinsic Homeric nature of the *Posthomerica*, at the level of general thematic tendencies and characterisation as well as verbal allusion, means that the reader engages these

⁴⁰ Esp. Pindar *Nem.* 7.21–27, and *Nem.* 8.24–26, 33–34, where Pindar makes clear that Ajax is unfairly overcome by the guile of Odysseus.

⁴¹ Further discussion in Vian 1959, 43, and James and Lee 2000, 101.

⁴² Quintus is careful not to specify whether these kings are Ajax and Odysseus or the Achaean kings altogether, with the number unclear. See Vian 1963, 110, n. 3, for further discussion: in the Epic Cycle (*Aethiopis* and *Ilias parva*) it is Ajax who does the carrying while Odysseus protects him.

⁴³ On this, see Hainsworth 1993, 102: “There is a permanent characterisation: Akhil-leus is open, Odysseus indirect.” In Plato *Hp. mi.* 365, a Hippias interprets Achilles' words as implying that Achilles is a truthful speaker, but that Odysseus is *polytropos* and *pseudes*, i.e., that these words imply epithets which belong traditionally to the *Odyssean* Odysseus.

⁴⁴ The principal study in this regard is still Stanford 1963a. On Odysseus the sophist, cf. Soph. *Phil.* 14 and Eur. *Hec.* 238, and similar (later) sentiments of Philostratus *Her.* 33.24, with Whitmarsh 2001, 197, esp. n. 64.

⁴⁵ As James and Lee 2000, 80, state, “Quintus maintains his Homeric manner.”

speeches (as encouraged) first against the speech-criteria of the *Iliad*, and the Iliadic characterisation of both characters. Thus, far from being idealised, or censured as a sophist, Odysseus reflects what he has always reflected—deceit and cunning⁴⁶—while Ajax keeps to his reputation of being a man of brawn rather than brains.

Quintus follows the earliest tradition on the *hoplōn krisis* by giving the judgement on the most worthy inheritor of the weapons to the captured Trojans.⁴⁷ Nestor, in making this decision, says to Agamemnon and the other Greek leaders at 5.157–60 that the Trojan prisoners should decide which of the two heroes they feared the most in battle, and who it was that rescued the corpse of Achilles; that is, it is implied that they would decide according to their own recollection, and not from listening to the arguments of both men. This statement of Nestor is then contradicted in the main narrative, where it is precisely stated not only that the Trojan prisoners will judge the winner from the speeches but also from the type of speeches (5.177–79):

Τῶν δ' ἄρ' ἀναινομένων Τρώων ἐρικυδέες υἱες
 ἔζοντ' ἐν μέσσοισι δορυκῆτοί περ ἔοντες,
 ὄφρα θέμιν καὶ νεῖκος ἀρήιον ἰθύνωσιν.

So after the refusal of the Greek leaders to judge, the very glorious sons of the Trojans sat in the middle, even though they were captives, to give just judgement and settle the martial *neikos*.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Contrast Bär 2010, 304: “It is significant that such an un-Homeric, yet specifically Sophistic character trait adheres to Odysseus in such a strong Homericizing/Iliadic epic poem.” As we shall see, his utilisation of Iliadic *tropes* in his speech to illustrate that wit is better than brawn is entirely in keeping with his Iliadic personality. There is nothing in the text which cannot be assumed in the *Iliad* or identified as explicit in the *Odyssey* with regards his guile on display in *Posthomerica* 5.

⁴⁷ At *Od.* 11.547, Odysseus states that the Trojans judged the issue, along with Athena. There was also another tradition in the *Ilias parva* (fr. 2 Allen = Schol. ad Ar. *Eq.* 1056) in which Greek spies at the outskirts of the city overheard Trojan views on the pair and judged accordingly. For further discussion, see James and Lee 2000, 69.

⁴⁸ The final line is translated variously: James 2004 gives “an honest judgement in the warriors’ quarrel” (strongly influenced by Way 1914—see James and Lee 2000, 79), while Vian 1966 gives “de faire droit en ce belliqueux différend.” What is important to emphasise is that the quarrel is between Ajax and Odysseus (implied, but clear from the context), and that it is about war or warriors. The latter definition (“martial”) seems more likely (following Vian), given that Ajax himself at 5.232 uses the adjective with *aethlon*, in contradistinction to the *mythoi* which should hold sway only in the *agora*.

Here it is stated clearly that the Trojans sat amongst the Greeks in order to give judgement on the *neikos* which will ensue, that is, the contest of words between Ajax and Odysseus. It is implied that they are sitting down to listen to a quarrel on the issue, given that neither Ajax nor Odysseus yet has spoken or argued on the matter. The arena has been set for a contest of words.⁴⁹ The genre of the *neikos* forms one part of the three categories which constitute a *mythos* speech in Homer, the others being commands and recitation of previous events.⁵⁰ The nature of a *neikos* as part of the repertoire of an Iliadic hero has been established in the studies of Adkins, Martin, and Hesk.⁵¹ Usually translated as flyting,⁵² it is a mode of speech where two heroes talk up their own prowess to the detriment of, and in contrast to, the prowess of the other; such speeches usually contain a series of examples to support the points of abuse against the opponent.⁵³ A similar modern-day phenomenon is rapping contests, like those depicted in the motion picture *Eight Mile*, in which one rapper aims to impugn his opponent on stage through his invective as well as poetical skill, and thus win the contest. Prowess in flyting is recognised in Homer as an enviable skill and a necessary compliment to military prowess, as discussed below with reference to the words of Odysseus to Achilles at *Iliad* 19.215–19. For example, Thoas is praised specifically for his skill as a flyter at *Iliad* 15.284–85.⁵⁴ Ajax himself is called *neikos ariste* by Idomeneus at 23.483, while in the same context Ajax acknowledges that there are others better than him at it at 23.479. This is the type of contest we have here, a contest of *mythoi*, or a flyting contest. The *neikos* is

⁴⁹This is also implied by the fact that the Trojans sit down *en messoisin*, even though they are captives. This position was reserved for the leading Greeks to speak and make judgement, as is made clear at *Posthomerica* 6.58. The phrase is used similarly in the *Iliad* (it occurs four times: 4.281, 7.384, 7.417, 19.77), but receives a peculiar importance in the *Posthomerica* (sixteen times: 1.215, 1.309, 2.173, 4.118, 4.128, 5.212, 6.8, 6.58, 6.397, 6.438, 6.531, 6.537, 11.8, 12.246, 13.85, 14.121).

⁵⁰Following here Martin 1989, 47, whose definitive study of speech-making in the *Iliad* has informed my own views for the *Posthomerica*. For the difference in function between a *mythos* and *epos*, see Martin 1989, 22.

⁵¹Adkins 1969, Martin 1989, and Hesk 2006.

⁵²Flyting, according to the Oxford English Dictionary (2011), is a “kind of poetical invective; originally, a kind of contest practised by the Scottish poets of the 16th century, in which two persons assailed each other alternately with tirades of abusive verse”; William Dunbar’s poetry of that era is an excellent example (i.e., *The Flying of Dunbar and Kennedy*). For further discussion, see Parks 1986, 441–44.

⁵³Hesk 2006, 4–5.

⁵⁴Cf. Martin 1989, 68, 72: “The ability to conduct a flyting match forms an essential part of the hero’s strategic repertoire.”

most often found as a prequel to fighting, the type of setting Ajax evokes here in Book 5, namely, a *neikos* found typically on the battlefield, which naturally suits his own battle-prowess. But it can also take place in the more formal setting of the assembly. This is reflected in the reference to the *neikos* on the shield of Achilles at *Iliad* 18.497 which is clearly some sort of legal dispute which is judged.⁵⁵ The constituent elements of a flyting contest hold true for the *Posthomerica* too, not only in this contest in Book 5, but throughout the poem, reflecting the poem's careful imitation of Homeric genres of speech-making and, of course, (accidentally) validating the modern studies done on the *neikos* in Homer; Quintus reads the *Iliad* in the same way. The scholarship on Homeric flyting has not been brought to bear before on speechmaking in the *Posthomerica*, and it is essential for understanding the nature of the contest between Odysseus and Ajax. Against the seventy-seven instances of *neikos* and its verbal forms in the *Iliad*, there are only eleven in the *Posthomerica*, all of which imitate Homeric function. Book 1 contains most instances, which focus around the unequal and invalid *neikos* in which Thersites engages with Achilles (722–65).⁵⁶

This contest of words in Book 5 is concerned with “the best of the Achaeans,” as is stated by Thetis at 5.125–27:

“Ἄλλ’ ἴτω ὃς τ’ ἐσάωσε νέκυν καὶ ἄριστος Ἀχαιῶν,
καὶ νῦν κέ οἱ θηητὰ καὶ ἄμβροτα τεύχε’ ἔσασθαι
δώσω, ἃ καὶ μακάρεσσι μέγ’ εὖαδεν ἀθανάτοισιν.”

“But let him come forward who saved the body and is the best of the Achaeans, and I will now give to him the wondrous and immortal armour to wear, which even greatly pleased the blessed immortals.”

This is the only occurrence of the expression “best of the Achaeans” in the *Posthomerica*, and conjures up the Iliadic idea which dominates the key dispute of the *Iliad*, especially in Book 1 (mentioned first at *Iliad* 1.91).⁵⁷ Since Achilles was the best of the Achaeans, the phrase here applies to

⁵⁵The language is clearly that used of the *agora* in *Iliad* 1 and 2. On this scene, cf. Adkins 1969, 9–10, and his further reference to and discussion of Arete solving *neikea* at *Od.* 7.74.

⁵⁶It is interesting that in Achilles' retort to the slain Thersites (759–60), he draws attention explicitly to Thersites' abuse of Odysseus in *Iliad* 2. The other occurrences of *neikos* and verbal forms are 1.722, 1.741, 1.748, 2.67, 2.81, 2.86, 3.97, 3.128, 5.592 (discussed below), 6.40.

⁵⁷For general discussion, see Nagy 1979, 26–41.

his rightful successor in that role; and as the previous narrative makes clear, together with the implicit praise of that hero, discussed above (at 5.130–33), Ajax is by rights that person. Thetis, moreover, equates the rescuing of the corpse with that status (125), and that therefore that person should step forward. But it is not entirely apparent who that person is. Thetis does not name Ajax (although the reader is clear about who rescued the corpse), and by doing so seems to set the terms of a contest.⁵⁸ This is verified by Ajax in his main speech where he states that Thetis set up (*theken*) this contest (*aethlon*) about bravery (232–33).⁵⁹ This then is a contest, and is meant to be read as such, in continuation of the games (*aethla*) in honour of Achilles in Book 4.⁶⁰

The *hoplōn krisis* referred to in *Odyssey* 11.545–47 was also read as a contest as to who was the best of the Achaeans. The scholium HQV on the passage makes clear that the Trojans judged Odysseus to be the best.⁶¹ Given the *Posthomeric*’s belated post-Homeric position as well as its own Homeric character, the singular use of this expression will be loaded with Quintus’ own interpretation of the ideal of the *Iliad*: the characters themselves will reflect this interpretation. Nestor states at 5.150–51 that Ajax and Odysseus excel all other heroes, Ajax in war, and Odysseus in council (*boulē*).⁶² In their traditional roles as eminent symbols of these two spheres, they are two halves of what constitutes, traditionally, the complete hero, the best of the Achaeans. In *Iliad* 9, Phoenix informs Achilles that Peleus had sent him along to give Achilles

⁵⁸The MSS having κε instead of τε at line 125 is an obvious corruption (cf. Monro 1891, 259, no. 283b), and nothing can therefore be deduced about possible generality concerning the “who” in question. The κε of line 126, with the future indicative, indicates limitation or condition (Monro 1891, 297, no. 326.1; cf. Chantraine 1958–63, 225–26, no. 332–33), the condition of giving the armour being that it is contingent, naturally, on the recipient coming forward, not on the identity specifically of that recipient.

⁵⁹This is the key statement, made by Ajax, which makes clear that it is a contest. Contrast Bär 2010, 307 (who takes no account of this statement). Cf. Soph. *Ajax* 1239–40, where Agamemnon clearly states that the *agōnes* for the armour of Achilles were announced to the Argives.

⁶⁰Cf. Bär 2010, 297, who also includes the ecphrasis of the shield of Achilles (5.6–101) as an *agon* of sorts between Quintus and Homer and Quintus and authors such as Philostratus. That the speeches between Ajax and Odysseus are an *agōn* is verified by the nature of all speech in Homer as agonistic (Martin 1989, 95).

⁶¹Further discussion in James and Lee 2000, 69.

⁶²Odysseus, at *Il.* 19.216–19, acknowledges the preeminence of Achilles with the spear, but claims that he himself excels him with insight (*noēma*), since he was born before him and so knows more. A lesser ability in the assembly in comparison to others is something acknowledged by Achilles himself at *Il.* 18.106.

instruction in deeds and words (438–43),⁶³ both necessary proficiencies of a hero.⁶⁴ This sentiment recurs in *Iliad* 16, where Patroclus declares that there is no place for words in battle, but that they belong instead in the *boulē* (630–31, spoken in response to Aeneas). This *cliché* is received by the two post-Homeric characters in different ways. Ajax, well-aware of his own shortcomings in speech-making, anticipates Odysseus’ artistry and likely arguments about the usefulness of words, and his type of heroism, against Ajax’s heroism without artistry in words. At 5.222–23, he argues that Odysseus will now, through his wisdom in *mythoi*, think up some great deeds. The mention of the *mythoi* and *erga* are both juxtaposed at the end of their hexameters for contrast. He then rehearses the classic retort of battlefield confrontations involving extended *mythoi* by pointing out the pointlessness of words in the context of bravery and war, and their role instead in the *agora* (5.229–34):

“Ἀλλὰ τί ἢ μύθοισιν ἐριδμαίνοντε κακοῖσιν
 ἔσταμεν ἀμφ’ Ἀχιλῆος ἀμύμονος ἀγλαὰ τεύχη,
 ὃς τις φέρτερός ἐστιν ἐνὶ φθισήνορι χάρμη;
 Ἀλκῆς γὰρ τόδ’ ἄεθλον ἀρήιον, οὐκ ἀλεγεινῶν
 θῆκεν ἐνὶ μέσσοις ἐπέων Θέτις ἀργυρόπεζα.
 Μύθων δ’ εἰν ἀγορῇ χρεῖω πέλει ἀνθρώποισιν.”

“But why do we stand here quarrelling with evil *mythoi* about the glorious armour of blameless Achilles, as to who is better in man-slaying battle? For silver-footed Thetis set up in the middle of us this martial contest of courage, not of grievous words. Men’s need for *mythoi* lies in the *agora*.”

Ajax clearly fails to realise that the context in which he finds himself is in fact the *agora* and not battle. This typical referral of *mythoi* to the *agora* by Ajax echoes, for example, a very similar famous retort of Aeneas to Achilles at *Iliad* 20.251–55 in a heated exchange of words as a preliminary to single combat.⁶⁵ Aeneas in fact transplants the role of a *neikos* from the sphere of warriors to that of bickering women and as therefore unmanly to the real work of war, something reiterated (implicitly) in Ajax’s reference to this as a contest of *alkē* (232) and (also implicitly) in his allusion to a physical contest as preferable. The contest here, however, is about conduct in war, in a setting of the assembly, and

⁶³ Cf. Martin 1989, 22.

⁶⁴ It is even implied that speaking in assembly is what really exalts a hero (9.442). For further discussion, see Griffin 1995, 128.

⁶⁵ Cf. Hesk 2006, 17, on Aeneas’ conventional theme of “weapons not words” in Homeric flying speeches. He compares Hector to Ajax at 7.234–43.

it is the ability to use words effectively to impugn one's opponent and convince the (Trojan) listeners that is the issue at stake here. Ajax follows the traditional structure of a battlefield flyting contest by thus invoking the uselessness of words in a martial context, but fails to take account of the importance of his surroundings and formal context. The two heroes reflect both halves of the complimentary factors which make a complete hero, or the "best of the Achaeans," but the fact that they are engaged in a contest of flyting, or *neikos*, to decide who receives the arms of Achilles, means inevitably that Odysseus will gain the upper hand, since it is he who understands his immediate context and engages Iliadic settings to prove his point, and censure his opponent beyond doubt; he shows that he can interpret and apply the Iliadic heroic code best of all.⁶⁶

THE *MĒTIS* OF ODYSSEUS

I will concentrate now on the speech of Odysseus and interrogate its arguments against the intertextual references made to particular Iliadic situations. Odysseus is, of course, as second speaker, answering the points made by Ajax.⁶⁷ He fails to answer certain claims made by Ajax about his conduct and abilities, including the charges that he failed to defend the ships (5.214–16) and that he does not have the physique to wear the arms of Achilles (224–28), but he does answer other claims.⁶⁸ It is not the points that he answers, however, with which I am concerned, but rather the way in which he presents his case as a reconstruction of Iliadic wisdom. Odysseus is very aware of the nature of the contest he is involved in. In what appears to be an un-ironical show of mourning on his part (5.574–97), he addresses the dead Ajax by saying that it was not about a woman or riches they were fighting, but rather that it was a *neikos* about *arete* (excellence),⁶⁹ strife about which always brings pleasure to men. That Odysseus will exemplify a particular type of excellence in the art of speaking is implied in the adjective applied to his speech in the introductory line of narrative (5.237–38):

⁶⁶This mimics the behaviour of the poet Quintus in his *Posthomerica*, who is equally selective in his use for Homer, as he directs the reader to the interpretations aimed at.

⁶⁷As stated, both have an additional short speech each after their main speeches; these occur at 5.292–305, and 307–16.

⁶⁸James and Lee 2000, 92, list the parallel passages where Odysseus answers Ajax's points, and give further discussion. For a summary of Ajax's speech, see James and Lee 2000, 80–81.

⁶⁹On the meaning of the value *arete* in the *Posthomerica*, see Maciver 2012a, 66–86, with Maciver 2007, 261–62.

Ὡς φάτο· τὸν δ' ἄλεγεινὰ παραβλήδην ἐνένιπεν
υἷος Λαέρταο πολύτροπα μήδεα νωμῶν

So spoke Ajax. And the son of Laertes answered him provokingly in turn with grievous words, plying nimbly his cunning ideas.

There are a number of intertextual references in line 238. The most obvious is the allusion to the opening line of the *Odyssey*, where Odysseus is described as a man of many turns/wiles, or much-turned (*polytropos*), and although the adjective is applied here to his plans (*mēdea*), the placement close to Odysseus' patronymic suggests that we can expect a more overtly Odyssean, and therefore more tricky, guise of Odysseus in his speech (*polytropos* is not otherwise used of Odysseus in the *Posthomeric*).⁷⁰ Quintus also imbeds a Hesiodic intertext (Hes. *Cat. Fr.* 198.3 Solmsen-Merkelbach-West):

υἷος Λαέρταο πολύκροτα μήδεα εἰδώς.

The son of Laertes who knows cunning plans.

Polykroton is a variant for *polytropon* in *Odyssey* 1.1,⁷¹ but Quintus is not simply incorporating a scholarly Alexandrian footnote to draw attention to the variant, and perhaps to his approval of *polytropon*:⁷² the very clear signposting to the Hesiodic passage in this line puts the reader in no doubt that the meaning here of *polytropia* is cunning, as a near-synonym of *polykrota*, which it has replaced. The presence of two intertextual paths here, Homer and Hesiod, underlines the multiplicity of meanings latent in this passage. It is also clear, from the description of Sinon in the eyes of the Trojans, at *Posthomeric* 12, that the adjective is meant to be read as pejorative (since the adjective in *Odyssey* 1.1 can also be attributed a positive reading); there the primary narrator states that some of the Trojans believed Sinon, while others thought that he was a cunning liar (12.390: ἡπεροπήα πολύτροπον). Odysseus does indeed lie in his riposte to Ajax where he states that he rescued the corpse of Achilles (5.286).

The Odyssean trickiness suggested by the introductory phrasing evolves into an intertextual trickiness in his opening words, which set the tone for the rest of his speech. Odysseus addresses Ajax in terms which conjure up a negative Iliadic image (5.239):

⁷⁰ Cf. James and Lee 2000, 93.

⁷¹ The variant is first given in the schol. to Ar. *Nub.* 260. Eustathius 1381.46 calls it κακεντρεχή καὶ μὴ ἀπλοῦν.

⁷² Cf. Vian 1966, 207, n. 7, on this line and the possibility of "correction" by Quintus.

“Αἶαν ἀμετροεπές, τί νύ μοι τόσα μὰψ ἀγορεύεις;”

“Ajax unbridled in words, why do you now speak such things to me in vain?”

This line characterises Ajax according to the Iliadic primary narrator’s description of Thersites before he rails against Agamemnon at *Iliad* 2.224; he is described as someone who was accustomed to flyte against Achilles and Odysseus, to the former of whom he was especially hated (2.221–22). Odysseus is given words to describe Ajax which conjure up a figure of hate and one of far lesser social status with no right to engage in flyting with kings (2.224).⁷³ He is specifically described thus (212–16):

Θερσίτης δ’ ἔτι μούνος ἀμετροεπῆς ἐκολῶα,
ὃς ἔπεα φρεσὶν ἦσιν ἄκοσμά τε πολλά τε ἦδη,
μὰψ, ἀτὰρ οὐ κατὰ κόσμον, ἐριζέμεναι βασιλεῦσιν,
ἀλλ’ ὃ τί οἱ εἴσαιτο γελοῖον Ἀργείοισιν
ἔμμεναι· αἴσχιστος δὲ ἀνὴρ ὑπὸ Ἴλιον ἦλθε.

Thersites, unbridled in words, was yet the only one to scold him. Thersites knew words, but they were unstructured and many in his mind; in vain, and without decency, to create strife with the kings, but he used to say whatever seemed to him likely to raise a laugh among the Achaeans. He was the ugliest man to come to Troy.

Ametroepēs in particular cements the two passages together (212).⁷⁴ In poetry, the adjective occurs only in Homer and Quintus (and in these places).⁷⁵ The implicit abusive characterisation of Ajax which only the reader can identify is coupled with the reader’s knowledge of the subsequent treatment of Thersites in *Iliad* 2. In his lower, despised status, he is beaten by Odysseus as punishment for daring to rail against the Achaean kings, and thus the parallel implies that Ajax is not only inferior in status to Odysseus when it comes to speaking, but that he will receive a similar treatment from his adversary here.⁷⁶ Despite the clear praise Ajax receives from the Posthomeric narrator earlier, the narrator is being equally slippery, like Odysseus, by shifting the terms of Ajax’s characterisation through elicitation of key Iliadic passages of flyting. Thersites’ characterisation and

⁷³ Verified by Odysseus to Thersites at *Il.* 2.247.

⁷⁴ James and Lee 2000, 93, state, with some unfairness, that “for once Quintus achieves all the allusive wit of Callimachus.” On Callimachus and Quintus Smyrnaeus, see Maciver 2012b.

⁷⁵ The Iliadic passage is discussed at Dion. Hal. *Ars rhetorica* 11.8.

⁷⁶ *Il.* 2.246–70; note the reaction of the *laos* at 270.

fate in the *Posthomerica* should also not be overlooked. Achilles kills him with one single blow after Thersites verbally abuses him (1.723–65), and he declares (1.751–52), like the Iliadic primary narrator (2.214), that it is not right for lesser men to abuse kings with words. Furthermore, beyond the description of the disorder of Thersites' thoughts and words in the Iliadic passage, Achilles, too, depicts him as someone who was a grievous bane to Odysseus by speaking countless shameful things (1.760: *elenchea myria bazōn*). Just as Achilles evokes the textual setting of *Iliad* 2, so, too, does Odysseus in his preliminary vocation of Ajax, but also in certain phrasing elsewhere in his speech, impugn his opponent as a lesser Thersites figure. The recollection Achilles gives of Thersites' words, at 1.760, is echoed by Odysseus at 5.272, where he states that Ajax babbles untrue statements (*etētyma bazeis*).⁷⁷

The association of Ajax with Thersites does not end there, however. Ajax begins his own speech to Odysseus by addressing him with phrasing which echoes phrasing used by Thersites to Achilles in *Posthomerica* 1 (*Posthomerica* 5.181, and 1.722–23):

“Ὡ Ὀδυσσεῦ φρένας αἰνέ, τί τοι νόον ἤπαφε δαίμων”

“O Odysseus with your terrible thoughts, why did a *daemon* deceive your mind?”

Θερσίτης δέ μιν ἅντα κακῶ <μέγα> νείκεσε μύθῳ·

“Ὡ Ἀχιλεῦ φρένας αἰνέ, τί <ῆ> νύ σε<υ> ἤπαφε δαίμων”

Thersites flyted him strongly face to face with a nasty speech: “O Achilles with your terrible thoughts, why did a *daemon* now deceive you?”

In this instance again it is the reader who has a necessary role in constructing a Thersites-identity for Ajax as the latter unknowingly casts Odysseus as an Achilles receiving words from one he is about to defeat (in the case of Thersites, with death; in the case of Ajax, with death by suicide). As the attention here in this contest shifts away from deeds to, instead, mastery with words, the poet incorporates other texts, activated by the reader here, to denigrate the Ajax whom the narrator had so carefully promoted. With the beginning of Odysseus' speech, the reader senses the instability of meaning given in the narrative, as the momentum shifts away from the previously exalted Ajax to Odysseus, as implied by the cunning intertextual games of the poet.

⁷⁷ An accusation that someone is given to *bazein* is a typical flyting technique used against one's opponent; Odysseus makes the same accusation of Agamemnon at *Il.* 4.355.

An additional Iliadic intertext points to another type of characterisation, this time recalling an address to Ajax himself in the *Iliad* (13.824):

“*Αἶαν ἄμαρτοεπὲς βουγαίε ποῖον ἔειπες*”

“Ajax, erring in words, you braggart, what is that supposed to mean?”

Here, Hector, in a context of flyting, answers the reproaches of Ajax in battle. *Bougaie* could be translated more literally as “big and awkward like an ox”⁷⁸ and so pays testimony to the typical characterisation of Ajax as an animalistic, near-immovable object with little intellectual capacity. For example, at *Iliad* 11.546–55, where he is compared to a wild beast, and especially at 11.558–62, where he is compared a donkey, Ajax’s stubborn yet dim disposition is implied.⁷⁹ Odysseus implies something similar in his speech in *Posthomerica* 5 where he states that a man of much *idreia* (know-how) is better in every kind of *ponos* (toil) than the man without any sense (251–52), and where he boasts that size and manliness add nothing to a man unless they are accompanied by shrewd council (*pinytē mētis*; 264–65). This one-sided representation of Ajax as the natural contrast to the *nous* of Odysseus is not altogether straightforward, however. The Iliadic Ajax, in Book 7, describes himself as someone who excels in strength as well as *idreia* (7.197–98), even though in his own speech in *Posthomerica* 5 he ascribes this latter quality by rights to Odysseus (5.223). Hector, in *Iliad* 7, validates Ajax’s claims with reference to his prowess in strength and cleverness, as well as calling him by far the best of the Achaeans with the spear (288–89).⁸⁰ The *Iliad* may be appropriated to denigrate Ajax as a kind of Thersites, but the intertextuality, as ever with Quintus, is not as simple as it at first appears.

As is typical in flyting,⁸¹ Odysseus then takes up points his opponent made against him and reinvents them for his own advantage. At 5.211–12, Ajax denigrates Odysseus’ claims to be better than him in strength since he has his ships drawn up in the middle, in the less-dangerous position:

⁷⁸ So Authenreith 1887. Hainsworth 1993, 284, calls the term “mere abuse” which implies nothing more.

⁷⁹ Hainsworth 1993, 284, insists that the donkey simile implies “tenacity not stupidity,” but (as he acknowledges) later epics read and recreated images of Ajax like this in a more specific way to imply his stupidity, in contradistinction to the intelligence of Odysseus.

⁸⁰ On this passage, cf. Nagy 1979, 31.

⁸¹ What Hesk 2006, 5, calls “innovation to suit the particular occasion and the surprising manipulation of speech strategies to make one’s own performance notable and effective.”

“Σχέτλιε, τίπτε βίη πολὺ φέρτατος ἔμμεναι ἄλλων
εὐχόμενος μέσσοισιν ἔχες νέας;”

“Wretch, why then do you have your ships in the middle if you boast to be much better than others in strength?”

Odysseus enlarges Ajax’s comments by echoing them verbally, but also by applying them to a context which suits his own particular prowess (5.240–43):

“οὐτιδανὸν δέ μ’ ἔφησθα καὶ ἀργαλέον καὶ ἀναλκιν
ἔμμεναι, ὃς σέο πολλὸν ὑπέρτερος εὐχομαι εἶναι
μήδεσι καὶ μύθοισιν ἅ τ’ ἀνδράσι κάρτος ἀέξει.”

“You said that I am worthless and grievous and without courage, I who boast to be by far your superior in plans and words which increase men’s strength.”

Odysseus’ initial point in line 240 is to answer Ajax’s typical charges of cowardice, which he does by echoing the words of Achilles to Agamemnon at *Iliad* 1.293, especially with the use of *outidanon*, and so is made to position himself as an Achilles figure rebuking Agamemnon for insults which are obviously untenable. But more importantly, Odysseus mimics Ajax’s phraseology of being the superior in strength (*bia*) by applying it instead to *mēdea* and *mythoi* which, he claims, increase strength for men.⁸² This gnomic assertion (in the relative clause of 242) sets up a series of proofs in the form of a priamel on the importance of *mētis* in tasks of strength and danger (243–50):⁸³

“καὶ γάρ τ’ ἠλίβατον πέτρην ἄρρηκτον ἐοῦσαν
μήτι ὑποτμήγουσιν ἐν οὔρεσι λατόμοι ἄνδρες
ρηιδίως· μήτι δὲ μέγαν βαρυηχέα πόντον
ναῦται ὑπεκπερώωσιν, ὅτ’ ἄσπετ α κυμαίνηται·
τέχνησι<v> δ’ ἀγρόται κρατεροὺς δαμόωσι λέοντας
πορδάλιάς τε σύας τε καὶ ἄλλων ἔθνεα θηρῶν·
ταῦροι δ’ ὀβριμόθυμοι ὑπὸ ζεύγλης δαμόωνται
ἀνθρώπων ἰότητι. Νῶφ δέ τε πάντα τελεῖται.”

⁸² He answers the point about ships in the middle elsewhere in his speech, at 275–77, where he states that a middle position always allows him to be at the heart of the plans of the chiefs for battle.

⁸³ The key study of the classical priamel from Homer onwards is Race 1982.

“For men that are quarriers *by wit* easily cut away in the mountains a beetling rock that is unbreakable; *by wit* sailors cross the great deep-echoing sea, when it swells to an unspeakable size; *by their skills* hunters overcome stout lions and leopards and boars and the species of other animals; stout-hearted bulls are tamed to carry the yoke *by the will of men*. Thus everything is brought about through *know-how*.”

Odysseus expands the premise on the necessity of ideas and words into everyday activities of the wild which resemble the world of Homeric similes. The series of examples are designed primarily to counter the suggestion by Ajax, implied at 5.222–23, and explicitly stated at 232–34, that strength and *erga* are more important to, and distinct from, *mythoi*. As has been noted by others, there are broad thematic parallels between this list and some of the scenes on the previously described shield of Achilles, especially the sea-scene and the descriptions of hunting.⁸⁴ Odysseus seems to illustrate that he understands the scenes depicted on the shield, and appropriates them and adapts them as examples in his speech to Ajax; it is as though the shield is by rights his because he knows how to interpret what it depicts.⁸⁵ Odysseus’ words are also heavily resonant with the advice of Nestor to his son Antilochus at *Iliad* 23 in the chariot race in Patroclus’ funeral games (313–18).⁸⁶

“ἀλλ’ ἄγε δὴ σὺ φίλος μῆτιν ἐμβάλλεο θυμῷ
παντοίην, ἵνα μὴ σε παρεκπροφύγησιν ἄεθλα.
μῆτι τοι δρυτόμος μέγ’ ἀμείνων ἢ ἐ βίηφι·
μῆτι δ’ αὖτε κυβερνήτης ἐνὶ οἴνοπι πόντῳ
νῆα θοὴν ἰθύνει ἐρεχθομένην ἀνέμοισι·
μῆτι δ’ ἡνίοχος περιγίγνεται ἡνίοχοιο.”

“But come now, my dear son, put wit of all kinds in your heart, that the prizes may not elude you. By wit, take note, a woodman is far better than by might; by wit a steersman on the wine-dark sea directs his swift ship that is buffeted by winds; by wit one charioteer gains the better of another charioteer.”

⁸⁴ Cf. Baumbach 2007, 120, for a list of parallels; he shows that lions, leopards and boars are also described on the shield at 5.17–18, within the hunting scene at 5.17–23, and discusses too the sea voyage at 5.80–87, and the scenes of peace at 5.60–61.

⁸⁵ This is the poetological reading offered by Baumbach 2007, 120, who also states, plausibly, that Ajax had in mind only the physical functionality of the shield *qua* shield (121).

⁸⁶ Further discussion of the parallels between the passages is given by James and Lee 2000, 94.

Polymētis Odysseus, by means of this intertext, takes the position of the wise and experienced Nestor giving advice to a lesser, inexperienced Antilochus, whose role by transference is taken up by the addressee, Ajax. Not only have the examples been elaborated by Odysseus, but also the words for cleverness (he makes use of *technē* and *noos*, too, as synonyms). The Iliadic passage also fits the Posthomeric context, given the close proximity of the games in honour of Achilles, and also given the fact that this pair of speeches is part of an additional contest. Once again Odysseus is made to appropriate an Iliadic situation which places himself and Ajax in contrasting roles and statuses, again to the detriment of the latter, and again only possible by rights of the literary position and nature of the *Posthomeric* as an epic after and because of Homer. This lateness of composition also allows other intertexts to have an effect. The famous Sophoclean choral ode “to man” in the *Antigone* (332–52) is paralleled (at least thematically, if not verbally) here too, as are, more significantly, lines 1250–54 of the *Ajax*, in which Agamemnon discourses on the advantages of the wise against the broad-shouldered, citing as an example the fact that an ox is kept straight on the road by a small whip (1253–54).⁸⁷ Agamemnon’s example is all the more important given that he is vindicating the judgement made in the contest for Achilles’ weapons, and implicitly suggesting that Ajax is the witless, broad-shouldered man who lost; in fact, the comparison to the ox matches the Homeric similes from *Iliad* 11 discussed above.⁸⁸

The focus of Book 5 shifts from an exaltation of Ajax, which had built up from the death of Achilles in Book 3 onwards, to the mastery of Odysseus the flyter, reflecting a primary narrator who is as slippery as the Odysseus he eventually promotes. While Ajax adheres to the tactics of battlefield flyting with *ad hominem* insults, Odysseus weaves an exemplary discourse to prove the unsuitability of Ajax as a *complete* hero and best of the Achaeans, since he has the brawn but not the guile, while Odysseus himself has the brawn by means of his guile. Odysseus is allowed to posit his arguments within a melange of Iliadic situations by means of the certain carefully chosen phrasing, Iliadic situations which conjure up the ideal of prowess in *mythoi* and *mētis*, in contrast to figures like Thersites who have no place in competing with those of higher status. Odysseus punished Thersites in the *Iliad* and made him a

⁸⁷ Further discussion of the Sophoclean passages can be found in Vian 1966, 207, n. 9 (who also cites Antisthenes *Speech of Odysseus* 13 and Ovid *Met.* 13.354–69), and in James and Lee 2000, 94.

⁸⁸ Cf. Stanford 1963b, 212–13.

laughing stock, just as he will defeat Ajax here due to his superiority in the art of flying, as he echoes Iliadic passages that put him, by transference, into a position of authority and wisdom. The Posthomeric *hoplōn krisis* requires a readership aware of the conflicts and fundamental ideals of the *Iliad* to appreciate the deserved victory of Odysseus, the learned reader, and complete hero.⁸⁹

CREATING THE MADNESS OF AJAX

The story does not end there. As soon as the Trojans award the armour to Odysseus (5.318–20), Ajax immediately goes mad (322–29):

Παχνώθη δ' Αἴαντος ἐν σθένος· αἶψα δ' ἄρ' αὐτῷ
 ἄτη ἀνηρῇ περικάππεσε· πᾶν δέ οἱ εἴσω
 ἔξεσε φοῖνιον αἶμα, χολὴ δ' ὑπερέβλυσεν αἰνῇ,
 ἦπατι δ' ἐγκατέμικτο· περὶ κραδίη<ν> δ' ἄλεγεινὸν
 ἔξεν ἄχος, καὶ δριμύ δι' ἐγκεφάλαιο θεμέθλων
 ἐσσύμενον μήνιγγας ἄδην ἀμφήλυθεν ἄλγος,
 σὺν δ' ἔχεεν νόον ἀνδρός· ἐπὶ χθόνα δ' ὄμματα πῆξας
 ἔστη ἀκινήτῳ ἐναλίγκιος.

The noble strength of Ajax was struck chill; suddenly bitter confusion overwhelmed him. All through his body his crimson blood seethed, and terrible bile bubbled up, and mixed in with his liver. Terrible distress gripped his heart, and sharp pain came shooting up through the base of his brain and totally enveloped the membranes, and collapsed the man's mind. He stood there fixing his eyes toward the ground like someone who could not move.

The acute medical symptoms of Ajax's madness, described in such detailed terms here, are in keeping with similar descriptions of, for example, the ophthalmic condition of Laocoon at *Posthomeric* 12.400–412; the detail led one scholar to assume that Quintus himself was a physician of some sort.⁹⁰ The result of these physical manifestations of his madness is that he

⁸⁹To an extent Odysseus reflects, therefore, the intertextual *noos* of the primary narrator of the *Posthomeric*, as his words require a learned reader for full exploitation of their meaning. I would not, however, go as far as Bär 2010, 309, who suggests that “Odysseus manages to get hold of the shield by resorting to a blatant lie . . . by analogy, Quintus succeeds in persuading his audience that he is someone he is not: Homer.”

⁹⁰Bassett 1925, 252. Further discussion of the description of Ajax here is given by James and Lee 2000, 107–8, and specific analysis of the terms used and their meanings is given by Ozbek 2007, 166–77. There is some similarity between the description of Ajax's symptoms of madness at *Iliupersis* fr. 5.6–7 (Allen), and the description here at 5.322–29 (see James and Lee 2000, 108, for further details).

stood staring at the ground like someone who could not move (328–29). The expression *ommata pēxas* (328) has a strong literary pedigree from Homer through to Apollonius,⁹¹ but the very first passage where the expression occurs is of particular importance to interpretation of Ajax here. At *Iliad* 3.216–24, Odysseus the orator is described by Antenor in the *teichoskopia*:

“ἀλλ’ ὅτε δὴ πολύμητις ἀναίξειεν Ὀδυσσεὺς
στάσκεν, ὑπαὶ δὲ ἶδσκε κατὰ χθονὸς ὄμματα πηξας,
σκῆπτρον δ’ οὗτ’ ὀπίσω οὕτε προπρηγὲς ἐνώμα,
ἀλλ’ ἀστεμφὲς ἔχεσκεν αἰδρεῖ φωτὶ ἐοικῶς·
φαίης κε ζᾱκοτόν τέ τιν’ ἔμμεναι ἄφρονά τ’ αὐτως.
ἀλλ’ ὅτε δὴ ὅπα τε μεγάλην ἐκ στήθεος εἶη
καὶ ἔπεα νιφάδεσσιν ἐοικότα χειμερίησιν,
οὐκ ἂν ἔπειτ’ Ὀδυσῆϊ γ’ ἐρίσσειε βροτὸς ἄλλος·
οὐ τότε γ’ ὥδ’ Ὀδυσῆος ἀγασσάμεθ’ εἶδος ἰδόντες.”

“But whenever great-witted Odysseus got up he stood and looked down, fixing his eyes on the ground, and he moved the sceptre neither back nor forward, but held it firmly like a witless man; in fact you would say that he was sullen as well as senseless. But whenever he let forth his great voice from his chest and words that fell like winter snowflakes, then no mortal could strive with Odysseus. Not then did we marvel as before when we looked upon Odysseus’ outward appearance.”

In this classic statement of the subtle awareness of, and manipulation of audience-expectation by, Odysseus, the contrast is clearly drawn between appearance and reality: Odysseus pretends to be a man without any sense (a sullen man, and a fool, as Lattimore translates line 220) to achieve the maximum effect of his wondrous oratory. His careful construction of this appearance also seems to be habitual, as the frequentative optative at 216 implies.⁹² Appearance masks a marvellous reality in the case of Odysseus; in the case of Ajax in *Posthomerica* 5, staring at the ground masks no deep thought or great oratory, but physically confirmed madness caused by the very orator described in similar terms in *Iliad* 3. Ajax, compared to an immovable donkey at *Iliad* 11.558–62, stands in reality like someone incapable of movement (ἔσθη ἀκινήτῳ ἐναλίγκιος) at 5.329, and assumes not only the characteristics of the very sullen man Odysseus gave only

⁹¹ See Hunter 1989, 99, on Ap. Rhod. 3.22 for a list of parallels. According to Hunter 1989 the gesture conveys deep thought.

⁹² Cf. Stanford 1963a, 71, on “Odysseus’ curious habitual pose before beginning an important speech,” although he does not deem that this pose is purposefully cultivated.

the appearance of being, but the traits apportioned to him only in the realms of comparative imagery. The defeat of Ajax is exacerbated by character-denigration via intertextual signals to Iliadic situations, which leaves the reader in doubt about his inferiority to Odysseus. Odysseus' verbal engagement with Ajax presents to the reader a poetological map of how to read the *Posthomerica*. Odysseus is made to speak as a learned reader of Iliadic settings, and demands a similar engagement of the *Iliad* from his own audience. In this way, Odysseus symbolises Quintus' own appropriation of the Homeric texts, and to an extent reflects the new type of learned, post-Homeric, epic in contrast to the old epic symbolised by Ajax. The *Posthomerica* is a text which demands an integral reading of the Homeric texts for a full appreciation of the complexities of characterisation, and the subtleties of meaning. The *hoplōn krisis* in Book 5 demonstrates that the key dynamic of the *Posthomerica*, namely, its Homeric nature, is what above all constructs its identity and is necessary for realisation of its thematic potential, within and through the poem's imperial, "Second Sophistic" context.⁹³

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